

Community Surveys Yield New Services For the Chronically Ill

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COMMUNITY INTEREST in the problems and service needs of the chronically ill and the aged has been increased in four Colorado counties in recent years by locally developed programs of household surveys and studies of nursing homes and other health facilities. The county programs received general guidance and financial assistance from the Colorado State Department of Public Health under a gerontology grant from the W. K. Kellogg Foundation from June 1953 through December 1956.

The participating counties were El Paso, Mesa, Otero, and Weld. In each, there is an organized local health department, either a college or a junior college, and numerous civic, professional, business, and community service organizations. Through such agencies and groups, new steering and executive committees were formed to plan the studies of the chronically ill and the aged. Subcommittees and voluntary workers assisted in carrying out the surveys. Community organization for the programs centered in the principal cities, but the household surveys and nursing home studies were countywide. Population coverage in the household surveys averaged 50 percent or better.

El Paso County has a population of about 115,000, including some 30,000 military personnel stationed in or near Colorado Springs, the county seat. The city, situated at the foot of Pike's Peak, is the financial, trading, cultural, and residential center of a mining, agricultural, small industry, and tourist trade area. Mesa County, on the western slope of the Rocky

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Mountains, is a fruit-growing, livestock-raising, and mining area of about 50,000 population, including Grand Junction, the county seat, with about 30,000 population. Otero and Weld Counties, on the plains east of the mountains, are occupied with agriculture and related industries. They have populations of about 30,000 and 75,000, respectively. The principal cities are La Junta and Greeley, which have about 10,000 and 25,000 inhabitants.

Desire for Action

In the four counties, a full-scale viewing of the interrelated problems of the chronically ill and the aged was afforded the committees for the studies, the many volunteer canvassers in the household surveys, and the smaller groups who surveyed nursing homes and other facilities. Heartfelt interest created by this personalized experience brought demand for action and immediately led to new community services. It stimulated plans for more comprehensive supplementation or reorganization of existing services in the future.

Lasting results of the study program cannot be fully assessed at this early date. Nevertheless, new activities and plans reported to date indicate that numerous postsurvey recommendations made by the study committees are now being implemented.

New Starts and Future Goals

In El Paso County, the foremost recommendation based on the community studies was that programs and services for the chronically ill and the aged be better integrated. As a start toward the needed coordination, a health referral center has been set up with community support, resources, and personnel and with technical and financial assistance from the State department of public health. In addition, a special committee of the county medical society is studying ways to integrate the numerous clinic services in Colorado Springs and to provide more adequate medical care to the indigent and medically indigent of the county, through medical society panels or similar methods instead of the county physician system used in the past. Need for a central rehabilitation serv-

ice was made clear by the community studies, and there is strong desire to build such a center. Much of the planning and sponsorship for a center can be done by community groups with the assistance of the executive secretary of the health referral center, but considerable technical assistance from such agencies as the State and Federal public health services will be needed. Shortly after the community surveys had highlighted rehabilitation and occupational needs of the handicapped, a clinic providing services only for convalescents from a specific illness broadened its program to general convalescent rehabilitation. Also as a result of the surveys, the Goodwill Industries accepted an invitation to operate in Colorado Springs.

In harmony with survey recommendations in Otero County, one of the hospitals established a chronic disease unit and is now interested in expanding that unit. Also, a chronic disease clinic is under development, and there is growing interest in coordination of clinic, home care, and hospital service programs for the chronically ill by the local health department and the hospitals. During or soon after the community studies were begun, news stories reported concerts by a group of "oldster" musicians, fund raising to establish a recreation center for the senior citizens, and entertainments to raise money for television sets and other recreational needs of patients in the new chronic disease unit of the hospital.

Concrete recommendations based on the community studies in Mesa County included these: organization of a rehabilitation service by the medical society, nursing home operators, public health groups, and other interested agencies; medical society, public health department, and public welfare department cooperation in a screening service for placing elderly persons requiring care outside of their own homes; and establishment of a registry of handicapped per-

sons needing assistance of various kinds. The report on the survey of nursing homes recommended finer distinction in definitions of nursing homes, boarding homes, and homes for the aged; appropriate standards for each type of home; more room space and greater privacy in the homes; and better understanding of rehabilitation and recreational needs of persons in the homes. Representative groups have continued their interest in organizing a pilot project to show how a centralized nonsectarian, non-governmental agency guided by a council of professional volunteers can help families solve domestic difficulties before they become major crises. If the project can be financed, special attention will be given during the demonstration period to problems of elderly and chronically ill family members.

In Weld County the community surveys gave impetus to formation of a new adult education class; legislative proposals for a school for the handicapped; new church programs for the chronically ill and the aged; and submission of proposals to the community building committee for a center for the aged in Greeley. Plans for establishing homemaker and home nursing services for the chronically ill and the aged of the county which were proposed at the time of the community surveys are again receiving active sponsorship.

Financial Aid and Technical Guidance

In the long run, the new services and the new ways of providing services which were recommended as a result of the community studies probably will not be beyond the financial means and personnel resources of localities. At present, however, the indications are that some financial aid and considerable technical guidance is needed to implement the recommendations more fully while community interest still is high.